

9/18/2006 This Week in Congress

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September 18, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." If you enjoy receiving this weekly email newsletter, please feel free to forward it on to others who may find it useful.

Congressional Agriculture Leaders Call for Disaster Assistance

This week, I hosted a press conference to ask for the support of the Administration and House leadership in coming to the aid of America's farmers and ranchers. Throughout America's Heartland, farmers, ranchers and rural communities are suffering from the effects of a multi-year drought - some areas in their fifth and sixth years. Last year, all but four counties in Kansas were declared disaster areas. While 2005 was a very difficult year, the situation in 2006 is shaping up to be much worse. The 2006 Kansas wheat crop was one of the worst in a decade and many of the fall crop production estimates are predicted to be drastically less than last year's production levels. In addition, ranchers continue to experience forage shortfalls that are forcing herd liquidations.

Members of both parties joined me and several agricultural organizations in the press conference to pledge support and

reaffirm our commitment. Convincing those in House leadership and those at the White House that disaster assistance is a necessity has been a difficult task, but we are still working hard and doing everything we can. When farmers and ranchers suffer, so does every small town in America.

For more information on the press conference, [click here](#).

House Passes Bill to Construct Fence Along Southern Border

In December, the House acted to secure our borders by passing H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. The Senate failed to agree to many of the provisions of this bill. Rather than wait and hope for an agreement with the Senate, the House passed the Secure Fence Act this week, which will provide for more than 700 miles of two-layered reinforced fencing along the southern border. It is hoped that the Senate will agree to this very specific bill and improve our border security.

Continuing to Gather Input for the Next Farm Bill

I chaired a hearing of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management this week to review federal farm policy. For the first time in the subcommittee's history, we heard from a panel of former Secretaries of Agriculture. Participating in the hearing were the Honorable John R. Block, Secretary of Agriculture from 1981-1986, the Honorable Clayton Yeutter, Secretary of Agriculture from 1989-1991 and U.S. Trade Representative from 1985-1988, and the Honorable Dan Glickman, Secretary of Agriculture from 1995-2001. It is often said that we must learn from the past to have success in the future. Hearing from past Secretaries of Agriculture gave the Subcommittee an opportunity to learn from those who have walked the path before us.

For more information about the hearing, [click here](#). I encourage Kansas farmers and ranchers to stay involved throughout the process by submitting comments about the current and future farm bill in the farm bill feedback portion of my website.

Earmark Reform within the House of Representatives

I voted in favor of a common sense rule change within the House of Representatives this week that will improve the accountability and transparency of spending bills. The rule change requires a list of earmarks in a bill or committee report and the name of the Member of Congress that requested the project. The American people deserve to know how their money is being spent and elected representatives should be given the opportunity to advocate for the responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

Learning About the Benefits of Rehabilitated K&O Track

On Monday, I visited the Kansas & Oklahoma (K&O) Railroad in Hutchinson with Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Adrian Polansky to inspect track upgrades that will improve safety and service reliability for customers who depend on the railroad to get their product to market. Watco Companies, which owns the K&O railroad, was able to invest \$8 million into the project because of a shortline rehabilitation tax credit Congress passed in 2004. The legislation, which I introduced, provides up to \$3,500 per track mile rehabilitated.

Pat Cedeno, Doug Story and Ed McKechnie with Watco Companies; Tom Tunnell, representing the Kansas Association of Ethanol Processors, the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association and the Kansas Grain and Feed Association; John Prather with Groendyke Transport; Hugh Mounday and Kim Barnes with the Pawnee County Co-op; Dennis Neeland with the Great Bend Co-op; and Craig Kramer with Abengoa Bioenergy Corporation in Colwich talked about the benefits of the improved track during the visit.

The rehabilitated line will allow the railroad to handle heavier loads at higher speeds, which will give Kansas businesses increased shipping options. It is estimated that close to 20 percent of the Kansas wheat crop moves over this segment of track each year.

Visiting Norfolk Iron and Metal Company in Emporia

I toured Norfolk Iron and Metal Company in a visit to Emporia on Tuesday. The 156,600 square foot plant was completed in 2001 and currently employs 149 Kansans. Norfolk Iron and Metal is planning a \$2.2 million expansion that will add 74,000 square feet to the plant and create an additional 30 jobs. I enjoyed my visit with Kent Heermann, President of the Regional Development Association of East Central Kansas; Jeff Bessmer, General Manager; and the employees. It is always great to see small businesses in Kansas grow and provide new work opportunities.

Speaking to Students at McPherson High School

I stopped in McPherson on my way to the State Fair in Hutchinson on Friday to speak to Rick Reed's senior high school government class. I talked with the students about my role as their representative in Congress and answered questions about the war in Iraq and the anniversary of September 11. It is important that our students have an understanding of how our government works and realize the importance of their participation in our democracy. Kansas teachers like Rick

Reed prepare students to be active citizens in their communities.

Visiting Memorial Hospital in Abilene

This week, I visited Memorial Hospital and Village Manor Nursing Home in Abilene to talk with hospital administrators, physicians and staff about how legislation I have sponsored will help them continue to provide quality care to residents in Dickinson County. The Health Care Access and Rural Equity (H-CARE) Act would allow hospitals, such as Memorial Hospital, to be reimbursed at a higher rate. Staff at Memorial Hospital stressed to me the importance of reimbursement rates and talked about the unique circumstances rural hospitals face. The H-CARE Act is designed to meet these special needs.

Thanks to Mark Miller, CEO, for the tour, as well as Millie Fink, Board Member; Bob Brazil, Chief Operating Officer; Elgin Glanzer, Chief Financial Officer; and Amy Hock Altwegg, Executive Director of Village Manor, for visiting with me.

Meeting with Kansans at the 2006 Kansas State Fair

I spent time on Friday and Saturday at the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson. The comments and suggestions received help me focus on issues that are important to the people of Kansas. I will continue my efforts to provide the highest level of service in Congress.

The fair wrapped up on Sunday and was another great success. For more than 100 years, the Kansas State Fair has provided an opportunity for family entertainment and served as a showcase for Kansas talent and innovation. Thanks to all who helped make this year's fair a success.

In the Office

Shelley Duncan of Dodge City was in the office this week representing Youthville to tell me about upgrades to the organization's dining facilities and the effects of Medicaid cuts on the Youthville program. Don Teske of McPherson was in with the National Farmers Union (NFU) to discuss disaster assistance, the 2007 Farm Bill and the availability of quality health insurance for farmers. Don also presented me with the NFU Golden Triangle Award for my support of family farm agriculture.

Walter and Pat Fletcher of Lakin were in to update me on recent issues involving the American Quarter Horse Association. Carson Johnson of Abilene, David Byford of Manhattan and Lynn Sparkman of Hays were in with the Kansas Association of Christian Schools to discuss the implementation of tax credits for school choice and the Child Custody Protection Act. Mary Lou Warren of Great Bend was in the office representing the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Great Bend to talk about budget passage and the problems RSVP has had with Medicare Part D.

Debbie Reynolds of Garden City was in representing Mosaic to discuss funding concerns, staffing issues, Medicaid reform and the need for affordable and accessible housing for developmentally disabled citizens. Kathleen Karr of Kansas City was in with the Senior Corps/Foster Grandparent Program to tell me about the need to protect local programs and to increase stipends for volunteers. Members of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers were in to discuss agriculture disaster assistance. In with the group were Kendall Hodgson of Little River, Paul Penner of Hillsboro, Dusti Fritz of Manhattan, and Joe Kejr of Brookville with his son, Josh.

A group of Kansans representing the Kansas Restaurant Association were in to share their support for associated health plans for small businesses and for legislation that would protect restaurants from obesity related lawsuits. In with the group were Dennis Carpenter, Michael Phipps, Bill Rowe and Gene Suellentrop of Wichita; Ron Seeber, Bob Carmichael, and Ron and Julie Hein of Topeka; Charlie Austin of Overland Park; Hugh O'Reilly Jr. of Emporia; Bob and Sabrina Symns of Hays; and Frank Ybarra of Mission.

Also this week, I met with several leaders involved in Kansas travel and tourism to talk about issues important to bringing tourism dollars to our state. We discussed progress in designating national heritage areas in the Kansas Flint Hills and the Bleeding Kansas Heritage Area in the eastern part of the state, efforts underway to develop a strategic tourism plan for Kansas, and improving the U.S. visa system for business travelers and tourists entering our country. In with the group were Dick Canter and Richard Foresler of Topeka; Judy Billings and Richard Smalley of Lawrence, Sylvia Rice of Salina, Karen Hibbard and Becky Blake of Manhattan, Jana Jordan of Hays, Jerry Cork of Overland Park and Liz Martell of Emporia.

Dan and Lynn Busse of Bird City were in with Pheasants Forever to talk about farm policy and to present me with the 2006 Conservation Service Award for my support of conservation policies. The Busses were also recognized at a Capitol Hill reception celebrating the 20th anniversary of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Conservation Reserve Program for their commitment to conservation-minded agricultural practices. I congratulate Dan and Lynn for their efforts.

Kansans in my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building included Lester Knoll of Victoria, Alex and Gayle Christopher of Salina, and Tim and Mandy Seley of Manhattan.

Very truly yours,

Jerry